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## Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2680, ISF COMMANDER ON AIRPORT SECURITY, NEEDS FOR

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06BEIRUT2680</a>	<a href="#">2006-08-17 08:10</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Beirut</a>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 002680

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/SINGH/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2026  
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SUBJECT: ISF COMMANDER ON AIRPORT SECURITY, NEEDS FOR WEAPONS

REF: BEIRUT 2672

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C/NF) In a 8/16 meeting with Ambassador and emboff, Internal Security Forces Commander Ashraf Rifi expressed confidence that the removal of an LAF unit from the Beirut airport and its replacement by the ISF (with its Sunni command hostile to Hizballah) has vastly improved the security of passenger travel. In arguing for the full resumption of passenger -- but not cargo -- traffic, Rifi also reported that the Hizballah-sympathizing airport security director had been sidelined by a general loyal to Walid Jumblatt. Rifi admitted, however, that security procedures for strictly cargo flights remain unchanged, and he talked of the need for sophisticated cargo screening equipment and rotation of cargo personnel. Rifi also cited successful recruitment (albeit with less Christian enlistment than he hoped) of 3,000 additional ISF officers, bringing the national police up to 21,700 (with 28,000 his goal). Yet he has no weaponry to offer many of his offices, Rifi said, asking the USG for help in getting 10,000 AK-47s or equivalent to Lebanon. Specifically, he hoped that the USG would push the UAE and Saudi Arabia to follow through on promises to provide such weapons and that the USG would provide coordination to make sure that the 10,000 AK-47s were permitted to pass through the Israeli blockade. End summary.

DISCUSSIONS ON AIRPORT SECURITY

2. (C/NF) In light of earlier meetings with PM Siniora and Acting Minister of Interior Fatfat (reftel), the Ambassador and emboff asked to see Rifi on 8/16 specifically to talk about changes in security procedures at the Rafiq Hariri (formerly Beirut) International Airport (BIA). Rifi distinguished between passenger flights, which he argued could be resumed at full capacity and regular destinations now, and purely cargo traffic, which he implied still had vulnerabilities.

LAF DEPLOYMENT TO SOUTH  
ALLOWS ISF TO ASSUME AIRPORT ROLE

3. (C/NF) Fatfat confirmed that the LAF unit that formerly screened passenger baggage and other cargo on passenger planes had been withdrawn from BIA, in order to deploy to the south. This was a serendipitous development that provided an easy opportunity to change airport procedures. The ISF -- with its Sunni command and its close relationship with the Hariri bloc -- has now replaced that LAF unit. With a one-for-one replacement, the ISF now has 120 people at the passenger terminal and will increase that number to 400. If the LAF (with officers at the airport supposedly linked directly to President Emile Lahoud) had Hizballah sympathizers in their ranks, they are now gone from the passenger area.

HIZBALLAH SYMPATHIZER MARGINALIZED

4. (C/NF) More important, Rifi argued, BIA security director General Wafiq Shugair -- who nominally reports to the Acting Minister of Interior but is known to have connections both to President Emile Lahoud and Hizballah -- remains in place but has been sidelined. A new airport security committee, composed of 12 ISF offices, now reports to Shugair's deputy, ISF General Yassir Mahmoud, a Jumblatt loyalist. (In separate conversations with the Ambassador, both Jumblatt and Marwan Hamadeh described Mahmoud as good. Hamadeh expressed great relief in the airport changes.)

Shuqair has accepted his marginalization, Rifi said, because the ISF "knows all about him": his alcoholism, previous smuggling activities, etc. Mahmoud's own deputy is General Elie Obeid, a Christian with strong airport experience and proven loyalties to the state. The tools that Shuqair used to have at his command at the passenger terminal, in terms of the LAF officers, are now gone.

RIFI ADVOCATES RESUMPTION  
OF PASSENGER FLIGHTS, UNDER NEW PROCEDURES

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14. (C/NF) These changes were all accomplished without the need for the cabinet to act, Rifi emphasized, as only the formal replacement of Shuqair would require cabinet approval. Rifi expressed satisfaction that passenger flights can safely resume to all destinations. The Ambassador noted that, given Lebanon's requirement under UNSCR 1701 to combat arms smuggling, it is in Lebanon's strong interest to request international assistance, which could easily start with a quiet request for a UNIFIL presence at the airport. Rifi said that PM Siniora would need to discuss that issue. Rifi did not like the Ambassador's suggestion of phasing in flights incrementally, starting with shuttles between Amman and Beirut (an idea he described as "not practical" -- although, we note, such a process is beginning today, 8/17).

CARGO FLIGHT PROCEDURES REMAIN UNCHANGED

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15. (C/NF) On cargo flights, Rifi was less confident. Purely cargo flights are handled differently than passenger flights; if the latter also carries cargo, they are nevertheless handled as passenger flights. For cargo flights, the LAF and Lebanese customs are in charge. Rifi did not have confidence in the loyalties of those assigned from either institution to the cargo terminal. In particular, he said, ten Shia LAF officers need to be replaced. While Rifi will deploy four elite ISF offices to the cargo area under an arrangement worked out by Mahmoud, Rifi also suggested that the Ambassador talk to Minister of Defense Murr and Finance Minister Azour about rotating officers. Rifi also said that Minister Fatfat was preparing a list of sophisticated cargo screening equipment that Rifi said needed to be procured by Arab -- not western -- states, to prevent the accusation of "mandate"-type arrangements over Lebanon. (Note: Perhaps mindful of PM Siniora's insistence that the airport and seaport blockade be lifted completely and immediately, Rifi never suggested that the blockade on cargo flights remain in place. But that was the implication of his message. End note.)

USG SUPPORT REQUESTED IN GETTING  
10,000 AK-47S TO LEBANON

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16. (C/NF) Rifi asked for USG support in acquiring 10,000 AK-47s or equivalent for the expanding ISF. He noted that he had just recruited 3,000 new police officers, increasing the size of his force to 21,700 (with 28,000 his goal, the level authorized by the cabinet). His only recruitment problem, he said, was getting sufficient Christians to sign up. But he has no weapons, he lamented. So while the ISF is taking over some internal positions in Lebanon previously occupied by the LAF, the ISF has insufficient weapons for its mandate. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have both promised such weapons, Rifi said, but they need to be pushed in order to come through with them. Rifi expressed hope that the USG would send a message asking the UAE and Saudi Arabia to provide the guns and to work to make sure that the weapons were permitted to pass through the blockade.

COMMENT

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¶7. (C/NF) We hope that we can help Rifi with his desire to get weapons to the ISF. In general, because of the ISF's connections to Saad Hariri and its heavily Sunni (i.e., essentially anti-Hizballah) officer ranks, the ISF is, in fact, relatively (albeit not 100 percent) reliable in terms of its basic outlook. But, especially in light of the ISF's failure to prevent the attack on UN House, there is a question as to how effective the ISF is on the ground. Certainly, the ISF needs weapons. In general, we see as positive the changes in terms of passenger processing at the airport. (Given institutional rivalries, we are sure that some LAF officers will decry the addition of the ISF to a traditional LAF stronghold.) We will continue to push for an international element and will continue these discussions with Minister of Public Works and Transport Safadi and Minister of Finance Azour (who oversees customs) today.

FELTMAN